Understanding Consumer Behavior Through Consumption Experience: an Auto-Driving Study on Off-Road Experiences

Fernanda Pagliarini Zilles, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil
Walter Meucci Nique, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil

Most studies on consumer behavior are based on the process that generates the purchase decision and culminates in the behavior itself. This perspective is based on the information processing model, which presupposes that, at every decision made, consumers evaluate functional characteristics and benefits according to the importance level, evaluate their presence in the different choice options, and finally choose the option that presents more general utility.

[to cite]:

[url]:
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Factor analysis supported the standard three-factor measure of complaining behavior in both countries. It also identified two stable factors for politeness in both countries. Unfortunately, as other researchers have found, the Hofstede factors were found to be unstable. The only clear construct was a two-item measure of power distance.

Results

The results supported the second hypothesis more strongly than the first hypothesis. The French taking the survey in English were not significantly different from those taking it in French in four of the six factors. The two remaining factors referred to voicing a complaint and being polite when talking with people. In both cases, they rate themselves more aggressive than the French taking the survey in French. Similarly, the English taking the survey in French think they would act more forcefully if they were in a situation requiring French. Although their response to voice was not significantly higher when taking the survey in French, it was in the same direction as the French.

Counter to Hofstede, the French had lower power distance than the English: means (on a 5-point scale where 1= low and 5=high) France 1.55, England 1.89, p.=.00. The English tended to be more polite, but there was no difference in the complaining behavior of the two countries.

Conclusion

Generally the results support the belief that surveys in a foreign language—at least to people who are fluent in that language—reflect the cultural beliefs of the country…with some small exceptions. The exception seems to be in answering questions that refer to behavior. It seems that giving a survey in a foreign language suggests that the question pertains to situations where the respondent would have to use the language of the survey. So the respondents ask themselves, “If I were in this situation where I had to interact with people speaking a foreign language, how would I act?” Some people, in this case the French, seem to think that they would compensate for their difficulty a foreign language by being more forceful in their actions. Obviously this subject requires more study.

References


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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Most studies on consumer behavior are based on the process that generates the purchase decision and culminates in the behavior itself. This perspective is based on the information processing model, which presupposes that, at every decision made, consumers evaluate functional characteristics and benefits according to the importance level, evaluate their presence in the different choice options, and finally choose the option that presents more general utility.

In the early 1980’s, researchers started to question the premise of the rational consumer, stating that consumers are engaged in a decision making process both cognitive and emotionally. The experiential view, as it is known, admits that perceived benefits can be psychological and free from any functional objective, and that people are motivated by something beyond the mere satisfaction of basic needs. The experiential perspective is focused on symbolic, hedonic, and aesthetic aspects of consumption, considering it a phenomenon directed to the search for fantasies, feelings, and fun.

After the introduction of this new perspective, issues so far ignored on the study of consumer behavior started to draw the attention of researchers, such as: the role of emotions in behavior, the fact that consumers feel as well as think and do, the significant role of symbolism in consumption, the consumer’s need for fun and pleasure, and the widening of the consumer’s role, who is no longer only a rational decision-maker. Consumers started to be seen as more human, people who can dream about pleasant adventures, emotionally respond to consumption experiences, and use products in several leisure activities. As one admits that consumers want to be stimulated,
amused, instructed, and challenged, one must also admit that they will tend to look for products and brands that provide the experiences they intend to obtain. Products are no longer packages of functional characteristics, but means to provide and improve consumer's experiences.

This study adopts the experiential perspective, treating the consumption experience as the object of study and trying to highlight its importance in order to understand consumer behavior. The aim is to identify and analyze the elements that form the consumption experience, including the context in which it occurs, factors related to the individual (thoughts, feelings, activities, and evaluation), and sensorial stimuli. Such information is essential both at company and academic levels, since it offers an understanding of the forms by which people experience consumption and use it to translate affections, desire, and social relationships, which can influence behaviors and formation of attitudes.

The off-road vehicles were the chosen consumption experience to be studied. It is known that vehicles are objects of beauty, passion, and desire, and that owners have a magical relationship with their automobiles. Satisfaction with this product category is every time more detached from functional elements, such as good engine functioning. It now involves style, aesthetics, entertainment accessories, considerations on lifestyle, and prestige. Purely experiential aspects involve the sound of the door being shut, seat covers, seeing, touching, feeling, and driving a car and the sensations and feelings that arise. Off-road vehicles specifically present their own characteristics for the application of experiential marketing concepts: they can be driven in muddy or sandy terrains, paved roads; they can be used both in the countryside and in cities, for civilian or military use and as a sports utility vehicle. This multiuse potential offers several experiences, from simple trips to great adventures.

It is known, however, that the study of human experience is different from the study of cognitive structures that can easily be measured through quantitative methods, which, on the other hand, only capture what is literal, without obtaining richer information on what the consumers have in mind and how they consume and use the products they acquire. Feelings, sensations, intentions, behavior, and expectations towards products and services are, therefore, more easily explored through qualitative techniques.

In order to perform this study, we have chosen the auto-driving technique, which is based on projective and visual research methods. This method increases the participation and involvement of the informants in the research process, because they are seeing and hearing their own behavior through the pictures they are requested to bring to the interview. The use of images and pictures as a means of data collection on individuals has already been used in previous studies that attempted to explore consumption experiences. Some of these studies, however, were criticized for using images chosen by the researcher, according to his judgment of what would be relevant and meaningful for consumers. In this study, on the contrary, we used pictures chosen by the participants themselves, which allowed us to interpret them as directly relevant and representative of their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values, and expectations.

So far, the interviews have pointed interesting insights. The consumption experience is embedded in a socio-cultural context with major tendencies of lifestyle and other consumption practices. The riders love being in contact with nature, are risk takers (not only in terms of adventurous trips, but also with their businesses and lives) and seem to forget their age, jobs and problems during the adventures. Another interesting finding is the relationship between the consumers, their car, and its brand. People not only love and adore their cars, but they also feel they are part of a family—the brand family—which, in turn, pushes them to join groups of riders of that specific brand, in a very similar way Harley Davidson bikers do. They create their own subculture, sharing values, habits and having in common social, political and spiritual aspects of their lives.

These are just some of the preliminary results of the study. Digging deeper, we expect to find much more valuable insights which relate the elements of the consumption experience—its context, sensorial and affective stimuli, cognitive structures, activities involved, and the value perceived—with other patterns of consumption and behavior. It all indicates that the meaning of the total experience is somehow magical and charmed, akin to the extraordinary experience of river rafting described by Arnould and Price (1993)—some of the pioneer researchers in this field.

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A Comparison of the Economical Behavior to Food Risk: European Consumers and Latin-American Consumers

Azucena Minerva García León, Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, Mexico
Ruth Areli García León, Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, Campus Puebla, Mexico

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

In the last few years European people have undergone several transient collective anxieties created by a situation of health risk regarding food, due to a possible human health risk situation (real or not). These anxieties are called “food crisis”. The negative health consequence generated by a risky human health product, and the frequency with which they are observed is called food risk. Consumers react negatively to this type of crisis; that is, they decrease or avoid the consumption of these products, for instance the “mad cow disease crisis”. As a result of this crisis the supply of alternative products (organic or biological) has increased.

A couple of questions must be answered: is it possible that an intercultural homogenization of food behaviors exists even though Mexican consumers have not faced directly these problems. How do the French and Mexican consumers react to health risks associated with alimentary and non food products?

The standard economic theory that characterizes the behavior of individuals assumes that they maximize their personal interest. However, there are other factors that may influence the behavior of an individual such as feelings, motivations and goals. Because of this some discrepancies with respect to theoretical models regarding this behavior are observed. Based on frequent observations about empirical studies, the models have been improved. There are some other parameters that have not been included in the models, even though they have an influence on the choosing decisions with respect to food risks: the type of risk and the type of products that possesses the risk. Thus, it is apparent that the economical theory has some drawbacks to explain food consumption behavior.

The experimental works that deal with the evaluation of food products having a human health risk measure the consumer willingness to pay for avoiding or accepting something in return for consuming a product having a health risk; or to collaborate in making them safer for human consumption. These studies use incomplete information, regarding food risks, that are not reliable or that are confusing to the participants. Many of these empirical studies such as contingent evaluations use hypothetical scenarios that are difficult to imagine for the individuals which may result in answers or behaviors that are economically irrational in regards to the evaluation to risky food products.

From our literature review it was found that the experimental works concerning consumer behavior to health food risk are incomplete since only a risky product is evaluated with respect to different information levels. In these works the behaviors to the same risk coming from different sources are not compared. In particular, there is not a comparison among the behaviors to the same risk in products of different nature neither in different cultures.

The purpose of this study is to determine whether the behavior of Mexican and French consumers to the purchase of risky food products is homogeneous. It will be observed how the individuals behave when they purchase risky consumption goods at a super market. The experimental method is the most convenient method to measure the consumer behavior to a risky product, since it can be controlled, it is not hypothetical and it is close to reality. The market institution that has more advantages to measure the economic value of the consumers for a good is the second better price or Vickrey’s auction. The economic value measurement that is less influenced by the environment for a risky good and that will be used is the willingness to pay.

The experimental protocol used in the experimental sessions to observe and compare the differences in consumer behavior to products of different nature having the same risk consists of four essential features: (i) a health risk present in a product of common consumption, brain cancer; (ii) the choice of two products where the consumption or the use represents the same health risk; an food and non food product; (iii) alternative products to risky products that guaranteed no health risk; (iv) different levels of real information about this risk; name of the danger, possible negative consequences due to these dangers and the magnitude of the most severe negative consequences. The experimental design consisted of three main phases: 1) the “learning” phase; 2) the so called “tasting and hedonic notation”; and 3) the phase of simultaneous sales of “real products”, at the second better price in an auction. The four products, arranged by couples of alternative products, are sold in parallel in each of these sales. These phases include four auction periods with a conducted sale in each of these periods. As an addition of this investigation a survey was conducted to obtain the consumption experiences and the socioeconomic information of the individuals participating in our experimental sessions.

The results obtained from the experiments conducted in a sample of French consumers are as follows:

In general, the consumers behave adversely to risky products when they are aware of the information about the severity of the possible negative health consequences. However, when the consumers are aware of the information about the type of risk and of the magnitude of the negative consequences they behave adversely to food products but not to non-food products.

Thus, the French consumers react differently to the same information about risks to human health depending on the nature of the product that carries it.